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ABSTRACT

Educators in the humanities must begin to seek some common ground with technicians in business and industry, by relinquishing their love affair with abstract ideals and clarifying what their disciplines should and realistically can accomplish for energy managers, businessmen, secretaries, and social workers. To respond to the challenges of new programs and new constituencies, educators must concentrate not only on methods of communication but also upon what is communicated. The sophomore literature course at University College (UC) in Ohio was revised to adapt traditional course content to new programs being developed in response to community needs. It now investigates literary approaches to such topics as: (1) The American Ethnic Experience; (2) Culture and Counter Culture--American Life Styles; (3) Divinity: Affirmation or Denial; (4) Utopia: The American Dream of Perfectability; (5) Conformity--Nonconformity: The Individual versus Society; and (6) The Paradox of Material Success. Revision of traditional courses is only one way to integrate technical and humanities courses. Other methods that have proven successful at UC include joint programs with local industry representatives; Project Assert, which involves senior citizens in the educational process; and the Playhouse in the Park program, where students earn a portion of their grades by providing the playhouse with needed services. (DR)

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The Role of the Humanities

in Vocational and Technological Programs

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The introduction of the Energy Management and other new programs which evolved from community needs rather than from academic tradition has greatly affected the behaviors and philosophies of some faculty and has influenced those of others not at all. One of the most revealing groups to examine is the humanists, since with them lies so much potential either for changing or for stifling an institution. The strength of the humanities curriculum in our University College is greater than that of typical two-year institutions since the college was created in the image of the University of Cincinnati, its values, and its history -- all of which demonstrate pronounced humanistic commitments.

This condition is not, however, necessarily a fantastic blessing when one is dealing with the introduction of new programs. Many of our humanists, feeling less need to justify their content or methodologies, are also less inclined to respond positively to the challenges inherent in the establishment of non-traditional courses. Much of our instruction still evolves from the conviction that scientific and authoritarian models work best in most teaching situations; we are beset with problems of elitism, segregation of disciplines, and isolation of humanities faculty from the demands of technical and vocational instructors, the community, and students with legitimate concerns about their educations. A significant number of our humanists are either unwilling or unable to innovate, to recognize the importance of employing interdisciplinary materials in their classrooms, to relate their courses to new programs. I suppose they prefer regarding themselves as priests of the past or as vestal virgins tending the eternal flames of culture.

Let me begin with a particularly outrageous observation: when the past belongs to priests who can't or won't share it intelligibly with those who needs its lessons to live effectively in the present and the future, then it is time to take a second look at the priesthood. When the flames of culture are tended by

individuals who refuse to allow others genuine access to the temple, then the "eternal" flames they tend may prove ephemeral after all, and culture may die.

If those of use who are humanists do have an obligation to the future and to the larger community, then we must develop the courage to break away from the priests and virgins. The process is painful because the goals for which they encourage students to strive are those which educators and society in general share. Who would quibble with Culture, Taste, Perspective, Rationality, and all the deities to which civilization does obeisance?

If, however, ore possesses at least a modicum of peripheral vision and can focus attention on more than a distant end, he unfortunately may observe that the enormity of humanists' ideals is disproportionate to the needs and desires of the average individual. Despite baccalaureate colleges' boring and defensive inferences that community college students are barely above the level of anthropoid apes, I suspect this difficulty is not unique to two-year institutions. Probably there were few, if any, genuinely "cultural humanists" or Renaissance types who graduated from the academically elite liberal arts college I attended.

The point is that we humanists can try to inflict our needs and desires on students and society, or we can seek some common ground with technicians, business and industry. To accomplish the latter, we must relinquish our love affair with abstract ideals and clarify for ourselves and our varied constituencies what our disciplines <u>should</u> and realistically <u>can</u> accomplish for energy managers, business men, secretaries, and social workers.

That which we cannot achieve is probably clearer to most of us than we care to admit. There was a time when I honestly believed that one could package culture into ten-week units and disseminate it to nineteen-year-old business majors. There was also a period during which I thought thirty-page research analyses would forever

alter the lives of dental technicians. But then again, there was a time when I considered thirty-five-year-olds to be over the hill, so I like to believe that experience has taught me perspective.

That perspective -- influenced by the development of new programs like Energy Management -- increases one's tolerance of technical faculty and community demands that humanists exit the temples, descend from the mountain tops, and "get on with it." If we can offer much needed insight into the human condition, if we can aid in the development of morally, socially, politically, and economically responsible workers, then it is time we do so.

"Doing so" or "getting on with it" will force humanists to take two enormous and potentially painful steps. The first of these is acknowledging to ourselves that the means by which we communicate are severely limited. We accuse technicians and scientists of linguistic sterility, but we are really no better. The level of abstraction in the written and verbal statements of most humanists is so great that their communication frequently becomes unintelligible to those who would benefit most from the information and inspiration they could provide. Humanists use language which confuses rather than enlightens, jargon which alienates rather than attracts. Robert Maynard Hutchins' view, voiced forty years ago, is relevant to our current predicament: "The university must find better and better means of communicating the ideas which it is its duty to foster and develop. A university without these means of communication will die, or at least will not be fruitful. Its ideas are not intellectual playthings, but forces which will drive the world. A university must be intelligible as well as intelligent."

If we are to respond to the challenges of new programs and the collective demands of heterogeneous constituencies, we must be prepared to concentrate not

only on the ways in which we communicate but also upon that which we communicate. Perhaps this will be the most difficult task of all, for it necessitates making some very difficult choices. We suffer increasingly from that which Alan Toefler defines as "overchoice": " a situation in which people become paralyzed by the surfeit of choice. . . There is so much that could be taught that it is almost impossible to decide what should be taught."

The problem is more peculiar to humanists than any other group in academe, and we must now set about conscientiously to deal with it. Are we actually so naive as to assume that the entire history of Western Civilization can be squashed into 81 hours of class activity and rendered so sensible to eighteen-year-olds that they will emerge miraculously endowed with "historical perspective"? Research in Twin Rivers, New Jersey; Hemet and Davis, California; in Baltimore; in Kansas City -- in fact, across the country has demonstrated that solutions to the Energy Crisis depend as much on human behavior and values as upon technology. The question we are being forced to answer is whether an Energy Manager will benefit more from memorizing the dates and generals of Civil War battles than from analyzing the arduous personal and political struggles of Lincoln during the war years. Both approaches are valid, but there is barely time for one; and the humanist must accept responsibility for having made the choice.

Similarly, it becomes less and less feasible in an English course to justify compressing three centuries of literature, for instance, into 54 hours of instruction as we have previously done with our sophomores at U.C. Then we are shocked and frustrated at their "cultural deprivation" when they do not waltz forth in June avid readers and connoisseurs of the American literary experience.

Business and industry are not seeking specialists in literature or history or philosophy or art any more than they want technocrats and human automatons. What they want, what in truth we all desire is to create a community of individuals capable of dealing rationally and sensitively with questions about

meaning, value, purpose, and responsibility in a world that grows increasingly complex and seemingly chaotic.

What we teach must thus be determined by rigorous processes of selection, processes which acknowledge that quantity of information is not a substitute for insight or understanding, that disciplines fragmented from one another often do more to indulge the instructor than to satisfy the needs of the student, that the past isolated from the present and future is just an antiquated curiosity, that education set apart from the real world is not education at all but a luxury society can no longer afford.

The following revision of our sophomore literature course is constructed around concepts and themes rather than chronology or literary movements. The current sophomore English courses consist of American Literature I - A study of the principal authors of early American literature, including Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman. American Literature II - A study of the principal authors of later American literature, including Twain, Dickinson, Crane, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner. The course revision consists of the following: 1) Strangers in a Strange Land: The American Ethnic Experience-Literary approaches to the experiences of selected ethnic groups. 2) Culture and Counter-Culture: American Life Styles - Literary approaches to various American environments (e.g. frontier, rural, urban, suburban, communal living). 3) Divinity: Affirmation and Denial - Selected readings reflecting American authors' views of the existence and nature of God. 4) Utopia: The American Dream of Perfectibility - Selected readings illustrating the American hope for a perfect society. 5) Conformity -- Non-Conformity: The Individual vs. Society - An examination of the American struggle to define freedom and responsibility. 6) The Paradox of Material Success: The Luxury of Integrity - Literary approaches to the issues of wealth and poverty in America.

It represents not a radical departure from tradition but rather an adaptation of the old to the new programs being created. An Energy Manager, for example, may derive professional as well as personal benefit from the second, fifth, or sixth choices. The relevance of the second and sixth choices should be fairly obvious.

In the case of the fifth option, an instructor might request that an Energy Management student relate literary themes of specific works to current studies on energy consumption and psychological reactance. Psychological reactance is a state in which individuals perceiving a threat to their freedom attempt to reestablish that freedom. In the case of the energy crisis, it suggests that external pressure to conserve energy might backfire by threatening the American's commitment to individual freedom. At any rate, the conceptual literary approach should be far more beneficial to the student than that of the chronological.

Revision of traditional courses is one means to improve integration of technical and humanities courses. There are other means by which we are attempting to establish interaction with the business and industrial communities. Recently we were invited to discuss the energy crisis with Cincinnati's Illuminating Engineering Society, and we requested that a portion of the presentation be devoted to analysis of the relation between the energy problem and humanistic concerns. We were surprised to find among the professionals considerable support for our educational approach.

Our participation in Project Assert demonstrates another attempt to communicate with a vital segment of the community and to sensitize students to human concerns. A federally funded program, Project Assert, was originally intended to draw upon the technical skills of retirees who might volunteer their services as college support personnel.

But the elderly person's knowledge of living is as valuable as his vocational expertise and can also contribute to the student's development. One way to teach Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman is to analyze the techniques of Realism and Expressionism in the drama. Another is to confront the issues of the play directly, to allow a senior citizen to provide insight into the tragedy of Willy Loman. I suspect that when "Realism" and "Expressionism" are words they have long since forgotten, students will remember their interaction with Assert volunteers, who helped them to understand Willy Loman and, hopefully, themselves better.

Academicians talk about culture and about encouraging students to support the arts; but unless we involve them directly, the likelihood of their ever becoming responsible patrons is extremely limited. In Cincinnati one of our pedagogical resources is the Playhouse in the Park, one of the most famous regional theaters in the country. Students respond positively to attending dramas, but even more exciting are their evaluations of work sessions at the Playhouse. These are day-long Saturday activities at which they can earn a portion of their grades by providing the Playhouse with much-needed services. Some of them continue their volunteer service after the formal class ends, and a significant percentage become yearly subscribers.

We work during a time in history when individual responsibility and creativity are desperately needed by academicians. Overchoice is as much a problem in education as it is in the humanistic disciplines. There are so many theories, so many opinions, so many journals -- so many words. We are too often attracted to or intimidated by others' prescriptions for education. Returning home from conferences, one sometimes feels exhausted by all the innovations, by the pseudo-certainty of others.

At such times Sisyphus and his rock seem very real, but then it's important to remember that a person struggling with a boulder can't allow himself to concentrate too much on someone else's mountain top.

I'm not certain that educators should be committed to attaining the tops of mountains anyway -- not if the ascent implies fixity. The Energy Management program is exciting today because it meets an immediate community demand, because it requires vocational faculty to adapt skills and discover new technologies for solving the energy crisis, and because it asks of humanists the most challenging task of all -- having the courage and the conviction to prove to themselves and others that the issues with which they deal are relevant to every kind of career training.

Tomorrow, hopefully, Energy Management will be a less compelling concern for society. In its place, however, there will be other demands, equally urgent, that educators will be called upon to meet. On days when the rock is especially heavy, when too many constituencies seem to be asking more than we can produce and offering us so few extrinsic rewards for our accomplishments, perhaps we should take consolation from the very immensity of our task. The community, parents, students will no longer allow us to rest on summits; we cannot morally rely on others to make decisions for us; we must choose and be judged by our choices.

If autonomy and responsibility are the primary aims of education then we ourselves must display them in our institutional planning and in our teaching, writing, and research. In doing so, we shall be reinforcing our dedication to the principle of Reason without which there can be no autonomy or responsibility. It is Wallace Stevens, a poet, who reminds us most articulately of that to which both vocational and humanistic education should be committed:

"The mind is a violence from within protecting us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality. It seems, in the last analysis, to have something to do with our self-preservation; and that, no doubt, is why the expression of it, the sound of its words, helps us to live our lives."

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